

MACLEAN'S
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Hovels for Heroes

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Maclean's Ottawa Editor

ON THE door was one of these WELCOME HOME signs that they sell in 15-cent stores. It looked a little pathetic in the dingy, ill-lighted hallway, but the full irony of it wasn't visible until the elderly lady opened the door to show me into the "apartment" itself.

Over in one corner of the big room a boy in khaki was pressing his sergeant's tunic. He had the ironing board set up between an electric stove and a kitchen table, piled with neat stacks of dishes and of food—they had no pantry. Laundry hung to dry on the screen of a fireplace that didn't work.

Another boy in uniform was asleep on the chestfield; so soundly asleep that he didn't stir during half an hour's talk in normal voices. A third soldier sat in a corner, smoking. One of his sisters leaned across the back of a kitchen chair, her head on the table, looking as dead tired as a human being could well be.

Eight people lived in that big room, and in the smallish bedroom that could be seen through a doorless archway on one side. Exactly what they all slept on it wasn't easy to make out. There were the father and

mother, elderly Scottish folk, two daughters and a schoolboy son. Now three more of the boys had got home from overseas. A fifth boy was expected Sunday, and he would have to live here too—there was nowhere else for him to go.

All over Canada servicemen are facing the same kind of thing. Reports from Maclean's correspondents in every major city of Canada all tell the same story—no vacant dwellings. Only Mattawa, Ont., was named as having any houses to spare; even the gold mining towns, which lost population during the war, are now reported to be crowded once more.

"Emergency Quarters"

AND IN spite of the earnest efforts now going on there's little hope that enough permanent housing can be built in time for this winter. "The only course I can see," said the chairman of a Canadian Legion welfare committee, "is for the Government to turn some of their temporary buildings into emergency quarters."

That's what had been done in the case of the "apartment" described above. It was, in fact, the biggest and best of a dozen dwelling units provided as emergency shelter by the City of Ottawa. The building is an old Knights of Columbus hall. The Army took it over first, then the city acquired it and converted it to living quarters for servicemen's families who couldn't find other homes.

These are not charity cases. The city collects \$30 a month for each two-room apartment, unfurnished, and most tenants could pay more if decent places were available. What they get for their \$30 isn't much.

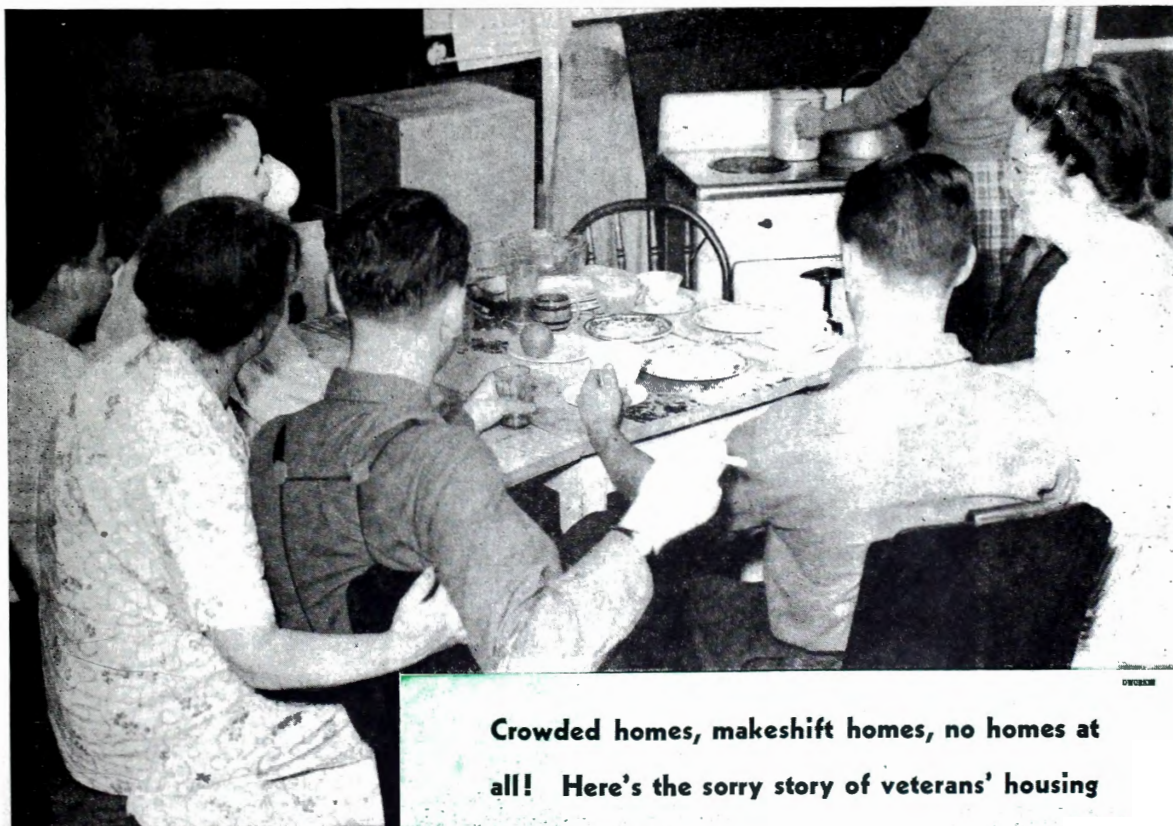
None of the apartments has a bathroom. Eight families on the two upper floors have the use of two lavatories, with two basins and two toilets in each. One of the women's toilets has no door, but they've rigged a sheet as a screen. There are no bathtubs. Two showers in a damp and grubby basement serve all 11 families.

One "apartment" on the top floor is divided by a wallboard screen into living room-dining room-kitchen on one side (no sink, though) and bedroom on the other. Nine people eat and five sleep in that room—father and mother in one double bed, three girls in the other. Down the hall is another bedroom where four boys, one of them just back from Europe, sleep in two beds.

But these upstairs people are well off. They have doors and walls between them and their neighbors; except in the bathroom they have some privacy. Downstairs it's different.

In what used to be the auditorium, "rooms" have been made for three families. The wallboard partitions

Scene: Ottawa. Home for eight
— this room and one bedroom.



are a little more than six feet high—a tall man could peek over them by standing on tiptoe—and there are no doors, just grey blankets for curtains. Each room, about 12 ft. square, serves as bedroom, living room, dining room, kitchen. One of them shelters a returned veteran, his wife and two small children. The wife and children had it while he was away, and when the father came back he could find nothing else for them, had to move in too. Rent, \$15 a month.

Of the 11 families now living there, 10 are pretty unhappy. "You have to live here to know what it's

young flier whose shoulder socket had been hit. He could move his arm only with great difficulty, and he had trouble getting to sleep because he couldn't turn over. This lad got married just before he went overseas, and his wife had been living with her mother in a two-room apartment. Now the young husband was living there too.

"There's one double bed in the place," he told the Shelter Registry, "and my wife and her mother sleep together in it. What can I do? I can't turn the old lady out of her bed. So I sleep on the chesterfield.

up, the in-laws too. But then the house was sold from under us, and we had to get out the end of May.

"First my wife went to a neighbor's summer camp, a shack in the woods—she had to carry water in buckets for the baby's washing and all. She couldn't stand it. Meanwhile her parents got an apartment in a summer place just outside town, a big, rambling, draughty house that they've cut up into four two-room apartments. So my wife and two children moved in with the old folks, and we put the oldest girl in a convent. I got a room in town—I go out to see them on Sundays.

"But now the boys are back from overseas, my wife's brothers. Three of them. They had to move in with their parents too, they'd no place else to go. So now there's eight people out there, six grownups and two children."

How could eight people sleep in two small rooms? "They use the verandah; they've got cots lined up there."

But what would they do when the weather got cold?

He grinned ruefully. "It's cold now," he said. This was in September. "I don't know what we'll do, none of us know."

Hundreds are in the same plight all over Canada. In Edmonton, Maclean's correspondent reported five families living in tents up to Sept. 1. Three more lived in one-car garages. An Army private with a crippled wife and six children was on the point of eviction into the street—indeed, a picket line of 25 people had actually formed up, to defy the bailiffs, when word came that the city had found them shelter in the onetime baby clinic at the Edmonton exhibition grounds.

"Freezing Order" Thawed

JULY'S "freezing order" stopped most evictions-by-sale, but not all of them. A Canadian Legion official was explaining this one evening, when a boy happened to drop in who provided a perfect example.

"I'm just out of the Navy," he said, "and I live with my folks at 327 Blank Street. Now the place is sold and we have to get out next week. Haven't anywhere to go, and my mother's sick—Dad's not too well either."

Didn't he know about the freezing order? That tenants couldn't be evicted even by the owner of the house?

"Sure, I know." The boy smiled without humor. "We fought this thing in court, and we lost. The guy who bought it is a war veteran too, and he used his gratuity for the down payment. Bought it before the freezing order came out, so the court's letting him have it. He wants a place to take his wife. She's living with his folks, and she claims she's living in one room, but the only reason she stays in the one room is she can't get on with his people. So they're putting us on the street because she don't like her mother-in-law."

The alleged "preference for veterans" doesn't always work, though here it's not the Government but the private citizen who falls down. In Vancouver an ex-Army captain, with a good civilian job, put the following ad in the Daily Province:

"DISCHARGED VETERAN with well-known firm desires to rent house in good district. Good care of property guaranteed. Agreeable to short- or long-term occupancy."

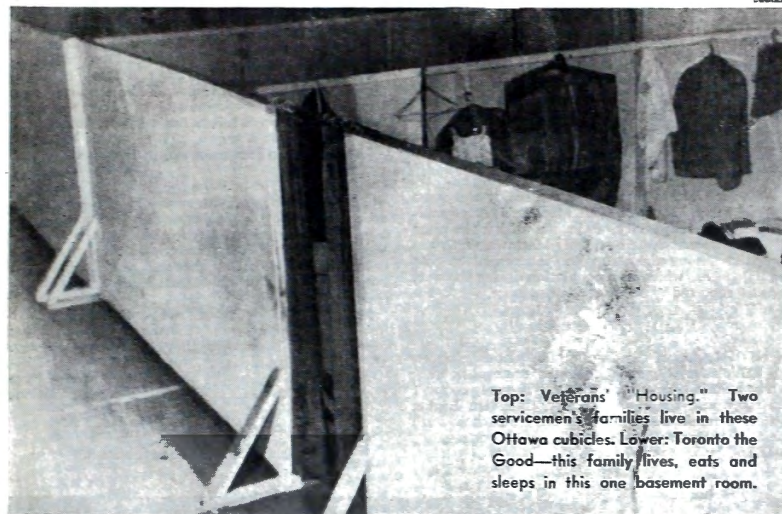
He ran that ad for three days and got two replies, neither of them suitable. Then he put in the same ad with one alteration. In place of the words "DISCHARGED VETERAN" he put "BUSINESSMAN." He got 14 replies, and a house.

That chap was lucky in being able to pay a high rent—there are still a few houses to be got if you pay enough for them. But none of the homeless veterans is destitute, and most aren't even poor. One of Edmonton's tent dwellers was an RCAF wing commander, with his wife and five children; they spent three months under canvas before getting temporary winter shelter in a converted building at the exhibition grounds.

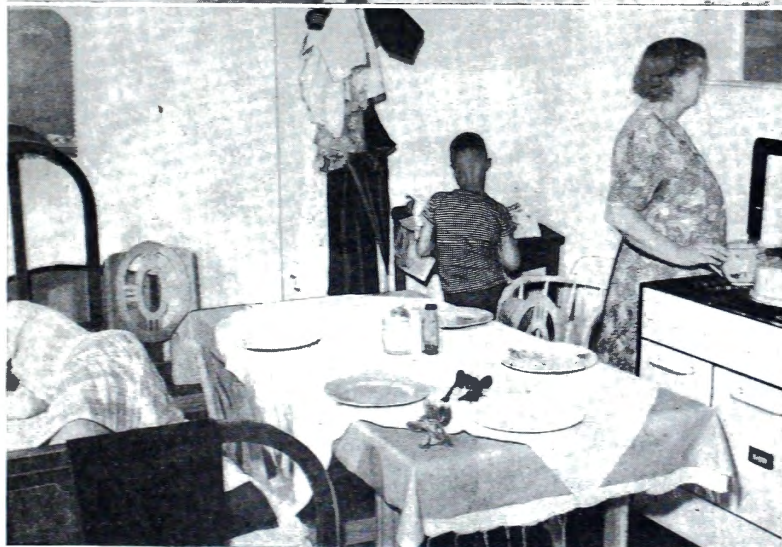
Vancouver needs 25,000 houses before the shortage will be wholly ended, in the judgment of the emergency shelter administrator, Air Marshal Leigh Stevenson. In Halifax the overcrowding has been so fantastic all through the war that even the exodus since V-J Day has brought little relief.

Winnipeg's rehabilitation committee sent out cards to 60,000 landlords and householders, asking help for house-hunting veterans. Only 300 bothered to reply. The Calgary committee opened a special veterans' housing registry. It got 137 applications in two days, but it was able to place only two veterans.

Montreal reported not only shortage but racketeering too. Veterans tell Legion *Continued on page 63*



Top: Veterans' "Housing." Two servicemen's families live in these Ottawa cubicles. Lower: Toronto the Good—this family lives, eats and sleeps in this one basement room.



like" an airman's young wife said. But the 11th family was fairly content. They'd been looking for a place ever since the father got out of the Army last January, so to them the emergency "apartment" looked like a palace.

"We'd been sleeping crossways in a double bed, the whole five of us," the young father said. "Now we've got a bed for ourselves and one for the kids it's a lot better. Got a piece of beaverboard down the middle of the room too, gives a little privacy, and the young ones get to sleep earlier at night."

This man wasn't bitter, so much as bewildered. But right across the country welfare workers and Legion officers report the bitterness growing.

A case one Shelter Registry will never forget was the

Ever try sleeping on a chesterfield with a broken shoulder? And I can't even get to bed until everybody else has gone, because it's right in the living room."

This went on for months. They finally did find a house for the boy, not long before his wife had her baby, but he was very near a nervous breakdown when his luck turned.

As winter approaches, the situation gets worse. A case in point was the insurance man discharged a full year ago, an older man than the average veteran, whose health had suffered in the Army.

"I was one of the lucky ones, I thought," he said. "My wife took the three kids to live with her parents, out of town. When I got home and got my old job back we traded houses with another chap and we all moved

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officials about being nicked for "aale" of furniture, latchkey, or other such device—it's against the law, of course, but the boys can't prosecute, they've no witnesses. They go in with their wives to look a place over, find the rent reasonable, start out saying "I'll take it." Landlord beckons the man to stay behind while the wife goes out, then says, "It'll be \$500 (or \$100 or \$800) for the furniture."

"But there isn't any furniture," the veteran says.

"Never mind, there's a charge of \$500 for furniture."

"Will you give me a receipt?"

"No, I won't even talk about it before a witness, and you'll pay cash, no cheques. Take it or leave it."

In this case the boy took it—he had the money, his war service gratuity, and he needed a place to live. He can't prove anything against the landlord. Another lad paid \$500 for his latchkey, having started bidding at \$50 and been forced on up.

An airman's parents and three young brothers and sisters lived in two east-end rooms, paying \$5 a week for each room. When the airman came back from overseas the landlord let them have a room in the basement for another \$5 a week—rent for three poor rooms now ran to \$80 a month. When the Montreal Gazette published this story the rent control people went up and cut the rent to \$28. But the family still couldn't find a decent place to live.

How did we get into this mess? And what are we doing to get out of it?

One way we got into it was by not building enough houses for 15 years. The 1931 census showed 25% to 40% of people in Canadian cities to be living in overcrowded dwellings.

A special parliamentary committee of 1935 reported that "a national emergency will soon develop unless the building of dwellings is greatly increased . . . There is no apparent prospect of the low-rental housing need being met through unaided private enterprise building for profit."

The Dominion Housing Act, 1935, gave some impetus to home-ownership building but made no provision for low-rental homes. The National Housing Act, which replaced it in 1938, does contain sections devoted to low-rental schemes, but the Curtis committee reported last year that these sections (parts II and III of the NHA) "were never brought into operation in any city." So the building of low-rental houses remained virtually nil,

and even total building was pitifully small.

England between 1933 and 1938 built nearly two million houses, Canada, 126,600. Allowing for the difference in population, this means the English built nearly four times as many houses for their people as we did. Which helps to explain one veteran's remark:

"My brother-in-law married a girl over in England. When he first got back he was trying to get her out here with him, but now he's applying to go back to England with her. Says that bombing or no bombing he can find a better place to live there than here."

War, of course, put an end to building on any but the smallest scale. There were no materials, no labor to spare. Also, it's fair to remember, war concentrated everybody's attention, and particularly the attention of the Government, on other things than housing. Wartime Housing Limited put up temporary dwellings for war-workers and let them at fairly low rental. Almost all private building was done for sale—without price ceiling—or for fairly high rent.

While war was preventing a normal expansion of building, it was greatly increasing the demand for homes. More people were earning more money; families who had formerly shared their quarters were now able to afford separate dwellings. The marriage rate increased sharply and the marriage age came down. So war's end found an abnormally large demand for an abnormally small supply of houses.

War ended suddenly, too, it might be urged in defence of the nation's unreadiness. But this argument has less force—veterans' housing became an acute problem with the end of war in Europe, and that was anything but sudden. A full year ago and more the Government rather expected Hitler to cave in before Christmas, and the final collapse was foreseen for weeks, even months. It was obvious we'd need thousands of homes this fall.

There were two bodies of opinion among Government officials. The National Housing Administration, under the Finance Department, wanted to bring private enterprise into the low-rental housing field on a large scale; Reconstruction Department men inclined to favor publicly owned dwellings, built by their Wartime Housing Limited. This was also the view of the two national Labor organizations. No matter which was right, either could have got some cheap houses built and rented if it had been able to start soon enough.

Neither did get started until mid-summer. It was July before Finance

Minister Ilsley gave his now famous pep talk to the life insurance executives, persuaded them to organize for low-rental building, and later altered the National Housing Act to meet their objections. It was July, too, when the Cabinet gave a green light to Wartime Housing Limited, having decided that no matter how fast the insurance companies moved they could hardly be ready to start building this year. And by unhappy coincidence it was also in July that the National Housing Administration, through Mr. Ilsley, announced a new scheme for aiding large-scale projects of building houses for sale to veterans—a scheme that offered priorities on material and a guarantee against loss to all builders who would accept a price ceiling and sell to veterans only.

The coincidence was unhappy because, of course, there wasn't enough material to go round. Wartime Housing Limited, which had been building less than 3,000 dwellings, now had orders to build 10,000 more.

Whether Wartime Housing can build 10,000 or even 7,000 homes is still in doubt—officials at Ottawa are hopeful but the men actually on the job are gloomy and say materials are pretty hard to get. But one thing is certain: if Wartime Housing does come anywhere near its goal it will use practically all the available material. There'll be none left for housing-for-sale projects. NHA's "priority" won't be worth much if the real top priority is to be housing-for-rent—which it is.

As a result some builders, who had organized rapidly into groups for large-scale projects when the NHA plan was announced, were disappointed and embittered. Loud protest came, too, from supply people, especially lumber dealers and plumbers. The Canadian Lumberman's Association, in September, accused Wartime Housing of "stealing" material from private builders, who if let alone, they said, could put up all the houses the country needed. Complaints were heard that half-finished jobs were stopped for lack of material because Wartime Housing priorities took it away.

Who's Right?

It's extremely difficult to tell who is right in this argument. Figures are scanty on either side, and they get out of date very fast. There seems to be no question that many houses have been delayed for lack of labor and material—Maclean's Vancouver correspondent reported 1,700 such holdups there during the summer, and Clarence Gillis, M.P. for Cape Breton South, says there were a great many in Nova Scotia, some of them being put up by veterans for their own use. On this latter point, though, priority officials say very emphatically that they have got building materials for every veteran, so far, who has appealed to them.

As for the general question of delays, they admit that a good many have taken place since Wartime Housing started its big program about the middle of July. But, they point out, Wartime Housing was expanded only because the private builders were not supplying any houses for cheap rental, and it's cheap rental housing that the veteran needs. They claim that *before* the expansion of July few serious delays occurred.

This distinction between rental and sale is very important. War Veterans aren't rich, and only a few of them know where their permanent peacetime job is to be. They need places to rent, at reasonable rates, not to buy.

And even for those who do want to buy, there's no price ceiling on houses. That's one of the things that worry

the Veterans' Affairs Department. They've already paid out \$1½ million in credits for house building. Counting what the veteran has to put up of his own money, and figuring the average down payment at 10%, this means something like \$20 millions as the total commitment these boys have undertaken.

They've made this investment at a time when home prices are greatly inflated. Federal agencies who had to do with housing in peacetime used to get tenders, for home building, that ran around 28 cents a cubic foot of house space. Nowadays tenders are between 35 and 45 cents a cubic foot.

Veterans' Affairs people figure that a \$5,000 house, pre war price, is costing the veteran around \$7,500 now. They point out that in many cases the veteran's gratuity and credit are simply wiped out—they come to less than the difference between what the home costs today and what it used to cost.

On the other hand, though, some Government people agree with certain of the complaints against Wartime Housing. They say it often does a high-cost job, in spite of its wholesale methods of operation. This, they explain, is because Wartime Housing tends to let its contracts to big firms, which often have had no experience in building houses. Smaller firms with more know-how in this field, they say, are passed over.

Why Not Permanent Homes?

Also, there's a strong feeling in Ottawa—particularly on the NHA side—that if the Government was going to go in for home building, it should have done it properly, built good model houses of permanent worth. These temporary dwellings of Wartime Housing Limited, they say, are a half-baked way of tackling the job.

Certainly anyone can see at a glance that Wartime Housing homes are not ideal. But the same glance will show that all the loud laments over "potential slums" aren't justified, either.

There's a typical Wartime Housing colony on the outskirts of Hull, across the river from Ottawa. Now the squalor of Hull has to be seen to be believed, and even then the passer-by doesn't see the worst of it. Lately the Hull police department inspected 75 buildings, in which 112 dwelling units housed 123 families, and classified six of the 75 as habitable. Only 13 of the dwellings had indoor toilets, 38 had outdoor toilets, and 24—believe it or not—had none at all of any description. They used pails.

After you pass through this elegant region the Wartime Housing colony on the edge of town looks like a garden city—clean, trig little houses with lawns front and back, where children have room to play in the sun. The young wives who live in them say they're all right, too—except for the "furnace in the parlor," a feature that infuriates them all beyond measure. But there's more room than you'd think inside those little white boxes. The bigger ones will take a family of three or four children without crowding, and they're warm and snug and airy. What they'll be like in 10 years' time is something else again, but they'll never be as bad as the typical Hull dwelling or the "emergency shelter" in Ottawa.

Anyway, for better or worse, Wartime Housing is building them—the thing is done, the decision made. They're putting up 1,400 in Vancouver, 600 to 1,000 in Toronto, 600 in Winnipeg, 300 in Montreal, 250 in Halifax, and so on. Altogether, at this writing, a total of 6,700 units have been approved and in most of these construction has begun.

They're hoping to finish them this year, if possible before snow flies. Men on the job are more dubious about this than the planners at Ottawa, it's true—but any way you take it we're going to have a big building year, maybe the biggest ever. The original mark of 35,000 homes before winter, this year, is likely to be exceeded, counting the private jobs, Veterans' Land Act contracts and Wartime Housing. Even if they fall away short of their aims for this fall they'll certainly finish most of them in the spring. There's even hope of reaching the announced goal of 50,000 new dwelling units by the first anniversary of V-E Day.

Billeting No Answer

But none of this, whether it go well or ill, solves the veteran's housing problem now. A house next spring is no help to a man whose home this fall—what's he to do for the winter? To that question our building program has no answer.

The Army recently questioned 17,000 repatriates on their housing prospects. Only 7,000 had nothing to worry about. They could go back to their parents or to the homes their wives had managed to maintain during the war. But the remaining 10,000 had no permanent arrangements. A few of them would be able to go to temporary quarters but most of them had literally nowhere to go.

There have been public suggestions, and some official discussion, of compulsory billeting of the homeless on those who have empty rooms in their houses. It was found, however, that there is not anything like as much vacant residential space as some people had supposed and it was decided that it would not be worth the trouble.

Not only welfare workers and Canadian Legion people, but Government officials, all are unanimous in seeing only one solution for the immediate future: Conversion of Army and RCAF buildings into temporary living quarters.

Some of this has already been done, of course. Regina is making 13 apartment suites out of an RCAF research building. Edmonton has hauled 300 huts down from Dawson Creek, where they had sheltered Alaska Highway workers. Toronto is making homes out of "Little Norway," the Norwegian fliers' training school. Other similar jobs are going forward day by day.

Others are not going forward, and these include a number of the most suitable buildings. In Vancouver they've been talking for months about taking the old Hotel Vancouver back from the Army. City council clamored to have it; Army tried to move but couldn't buy a suitable site from the Province; Army offered to, and did, clear two floors of the hotel and offered these to the City, but they were refused; meanwhile a building that could house a good many childless couples or single men is going to waste.

In Ottawa, Army offices have been taking up one of the biggest apartment blocks in town. It has over 100 suites, which lack only plumbing and kitchen equipment to become Grade A living quarters. But as the Army moved out in mid-September civilian offices moved in—including, ironically enough, part of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Emergency Shelter Administrator.

Meanwhile bitterness is growing. Everywhere you find officials in the field, welfare workers and such, saying, "Don't quote me, but I think the boys are going to tear the lid right off if this situation goes on much longer. And—don't quote me—I can't say I blame them."